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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9367
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2237
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5701
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9303
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6884
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2295
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2675
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000540

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)
SUBJECT: STATE-RUN MEDIA OFFERS EXTENSIVE, POSITIVE
COVERAGE OF SENATOR WEBB VISIT

Classified By: Political Officer Marc Shaw for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Media reaction to Senator Webb's visit figured prominently in both state- and privately-owned Burmese newspapers. The weekend editions of the state-run daily, Myanmar Ahlin, and its English-language equivalent, New Light of Myanmar (NLM), contained lengthy reports on Senator Webb's meetings with Than Shwe and the Prime Minister, with shorter articles on the Senator's other meetings, including the one with Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK). Editorials -- recently quite critical of the U.S. -- also cast the Webb visit in a positive light. The regime is also portraying itself as a beacon of humanitarianism and cooperative player in the international arena through granting the release of John Yettaw and a meeting with ASSK. End Summary.

Spotlight on Webb Visit

¶2. (SBU) Burma's State-run media has extensively covered Senator Webb's August 14-16 visit. The NLM contained lengthy write-ups of the Senator's meetings with SPDC officials while separate, shorter articles reported on his meetings with the Commission for Drafting the State Constitution, political parties, ethnic ceasefire groups, and Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK). The NLM even covered Senator Webb's departure from Rangoon and his press conference. As is typical of NLM reporting, the articles focused on who was present at the meeting and offered little on what was discussed. In the Burmese context, however, noting a long list of senior GOB officials present at a meeting is itself a means to signal the relative importance of an event.

¶3. (C) The only privately-owned English-language weekly journal, Myanmar Times, carried a front-page report on Senator Webb's press conference, noting the Senator's call for ASSK's participation in the political process and free and fair elections. The English-language journal, which like all publications in Burma is censored by the government, quoted word-for-word Senator Webb's comments at the airport. In a conversation with Embassy PD Officer, the article's ghost writer -- a UK citizen who has worked for six years as

an editor at the newspaper -- said he "could not remember when, or if, we were last allowed to run such references on the front page." By comparison, the journalist noted that the censor board recently cut an article summarizing the UN Security Council statement in response to the ASSK verdict.

14. (SBU) The best indication of the regime's desire to portray the visit positively is the August 18 NKM editorial entitled "The First Step of a Long Journey." The editorial explained that Burma enthusiastically cooperated with Senator Webb because it wants "to deepen bilateral relations and relieve the disagreements between the two countries." It also noted the visit should be viewed as a success for both the United States and Burma. The editorial made clear the reasons behind UN SYG Ban Ki-moon's request to visit ASSK being denied; she was still on trial at the time. Finally (because this is Burma), the editorial emphasized the magnanimous nature of Senior General Than Shwe in releasing John Yettaw and allowing the Senator to meet with ASSK.

VAJDA